

Deonay. Fecteau

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Press Item for the DCI

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LYNN, Mass. AP - After 19 years in Chinese prisons, most of that time in solitary confinement, Richard G. Fecteau, 43, heard unfamiliar footsteps outside his cell door last Dec. 9. When the door opened, an official told him he had to face another military tribunal. He was taken before an official seated at a small desk. The official spoke and an interpreter translated.

"You are now being released," was what he heard. There was no advance inkling of what was coming, Fecteau said in a copyright interview in the Lynn Daily Evening Item.

Fecteau said he was given permission to turn over to his fellow prisoner, John Downey, of New Britain, Conn., what he had left of the food sent to him from Lynn by his parents in the twice-a-month 11-pound packages he was allowed to receive.

The following day, accompanied by four guards, Fecteau left Peking by train for Canton, where he was kept overnight in a hotel room.

The following day his guards took him by train to the border and turned him loose to walk across a bridge into Hong Kong and freedom.

"I didn't have a dime in my pocket and my only identification was a Chinese vaccination certificate," he said.

Fecteau found a British immigration officer who called the American consulate. Moments after he had arrived at the immigration office, Mary Ann Harbert, 22, of Palo Alto, Calif., walked in.

He had seen her earlier at the Canton railroad station, but had no idea who she was. Miss Harbert had been imprisoned 31 years earlier when a yacht in which she was sailing was seized by the Chinese.

A helicopter picked up the pair at the border station and took them to a military base where a hospital plane was sent to ferry them home.

Fecteau said that there were several breaks in his years of solitary confinement. He said the Chinese apparently were trying to indoctrinate him with displays of their progress.

In 1966 he and Downey were taken on a four-day tour of factories, farms and other places in the Peking area, and on their return to prison were asked to write a report on what they had seen.

Five months later they were taken on a more extended tour which lasted four weeks and took them to several cities and areas in the northeast section of China, including the seaport of Shanghai.

During that tour they were taken to the theater twice, and had visits to parks and fairs, he said.

Fecteau said he was told there would be more tours, but there weren't.

Fecteau and Downey were captured in 1952 when their plane was shot down. A military tribunal sentenced him to 20 years and Downey, who piloted the plane, to life.

The Chinese claimed the two were spies engaged in dropping Nationalist operatives into China. The United States has repeatedly denied the charges.

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These comments represent the initial and tentative reaction of the Office of Current Intelligence to the attached item from the news services.